Élaine Audet

Prostitution

Feminist Perspectives

Foreword by Lee Lakeman

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Other publications by the same author

Soleil noir, poetry, Paris, Nouvelles éditions Debresse, 1958.

Pierre-feu, poetry, illustrations by Claude Carette. Geneva, Poésie vivante, 1966.

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Translated by Carol Card
and Philippe Robert de Massy

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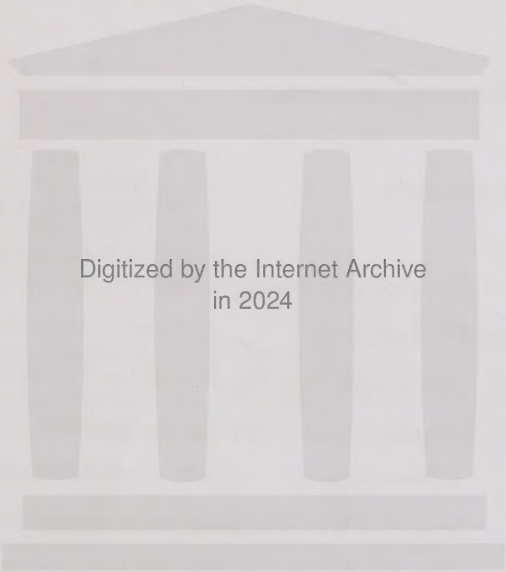

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Foreword

Lee Lakeman

For more than 30 years, feminists in Quebec and those living in the rest of the pan-Canadian state have conducted a brilliant, productive and effective communication about Violence against Women and the role of that violence in enforcing the inequality, the oppression of women. Élaine Audet's book, surveying and discussing feminist ideas about prostitution is another great moment in that discussion.

Audet is not new to the debate. She has studied, written and published about patriarchy violence and prostitution for many years. She, like the women in the Regroupement des CALACS and the other centers of the Canadian

Association of Sexual Assault Centers, successfully continued key libratory exchanges across the Canadian landscape in spite of the divides created by language and culture, so important in this context in which we are dominated by the social political and economic interests of neo-liberalism. Notably the debates have been enriched recently by the voices of Ana Popovich, the Aboriginal Women's Action Network the Ex-Prostitutes Against Sexual Servitude and the Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle.

That theoretical and practical conversation about violence – including prostitution – continues today in no small part supported by the web site Sisyphe.org in which Audet has a significant influence as co-publisher and where one can find more than 300 texts and testimonies on prostitution, in French and English.

In this book, Audet has collected a broad range of women's voices to consider the feminist theoretical fundamentals of prostitution. For many of us the book introduces new sources. Her politics are global. From that perspective, she challenges the notion that it is normal and even pro-woman to assert that most women want and

support the "choice" of prostitution. She examines the growing consensus, roots and breath of argument for the abolition of prostitution.

Feminist theory and practice to stop violence against women encompasses the male behaviour and consequences of wife assault and incest, sexual harassment and date rape so fundamental to women's oppression. In this new century anti violence activists indeed across the world have concentrated our attention on the conditions of the most disadvantaged in our midst including women in prostitution: those forced to migrate from ecologically devastated homelands by exploitation of their resources, or those swept up in the moving tides of humans in war zones that could have been prevented, those objectified and commodified by the sex tourism of the men we know, those held in captivity from their premature childhood's end to those abandoned in old age or widowhood by uncaring states including our own. Among these are the women we find devastated in our inner cities: migrants from impoverished reserves, mill towns arriving over highways, through ports and airports. These are the women vulnerable to the johns, pimps and procurers.

Well-researched theory, like that presented here by Audet, calls us back to the compassionate and transformative practices of feminism.

The call of anti violence feminists is neither for the traditional law and order agenda applied with no heed of the lack of positive impact on women's liberty nor for the new age neo-liberalism that tells each woman she is on her own to defend herself against attack while government policy cooperates in rendering her vulnerable to each predatory enterprising man: hobbling her in ineffective criminal justice, unequal pay, pornographic culture and political exclusion.

We will be deterred neither by ineffective nor vengeful law enforcement. And we are not silenced by the commercial media blackout of the swelling public distress at the promotion of prostitution and of the black out of our determination to rid ourselves as a society of the hyper-sexualization of girls.

This book presents arguments in a vivid and individual style and aesthetic. But make no mistake. This is the particular singular voice speaking a truth and a warning of a wide and growing movement of feminists toward the abolition of prostitution.

I hope you will consider the ideas Audet has put before you. Give a thought; give a care to the interlocked freedom of women. Give a thought to the Gordian knot of violence that prevents freedom and the sexist inequality that promotes violence. Give a thought to the human entanglement that makes your freedom my concern and makes mine yours. The revolution will go on with or without you but life is so much better for your willing engagement and perhaps the movement will be better for your thoughts and participation.

Presentation

Élaine Audet is a feminist researcher who has long been engaged in the study of prostitution. In this essay, she offers an overview of feminist perspectives on the subject and goes right to the heart of the debate about whether prostitution should be decriminalized or everything possible should be done to abolish it. She focuses on the innumerable consequences that such legislated legitimacy would have for all women.

Relying on the documented experience of many women, the author shows that decriminalizing prostitution will in no way fulfill the hopes of prostituted women looking for solutions to

the problems they encounter related to health, violence, stigmatization and safety. She analyses the central role played by clients in perpetuating prostitution. She demonstrates that, contrary to the claims of those who promote "sex work," traffickers and pimps have a stronger hold than ever on women in prostitution.

Élaine Audet emphasizes the link between global sex trafficking and local prostitution and shows how, in certain countries, it is considered normal for the sex industry to contribute to the national economy and job creation. She points out that many experts see Canada as a hub of sex tourism and the trafficking of women and children for the purpose of prostitution.

In her conclusion, Élaine Audet reviews different strategies for eradicating prostitution and draws on the Swedish experience as a positive model. She also underlines the need to oppose the commercialization of sex, since the sex industry is linked to organized crime and generates profits at the expense of the most vulnerable women and children. She calls on feminist forces to unite in the struggle against patriarchy's ongoing and increasing commodification of women to further its own ends.

A poet and essayist, Élaine Audet has published a number of books in Quebec and elsewhere. Her latest essay, *Le Coeur pensant – Courtepointe de l'amitié entre femmes*[1], was published by Loup de Gouttière in 2000. From 1989 to 2004, she wrote a feminist and literary column in the monthly political magazine *l'aut'journal* and she is responsible, with Micheline Carrier, of the Sisyphe website and Éditions Sisyphe.

Note

1. *The Thoughtful Heart – A Quilt of Friendship Between Women.*

1

Incompatible Positions

The present movement in favour of decriminalizing prostitution is rooted in the general liberalization of the economy and objectively serves this interest. More and more frequently, in the United Nations and the media, we hear the idea touted that the sex industry can solve economic problems and even contribute to economic development. The stakes are high and one can assume that every means of political, economic and media pressure will be brought to bear in promoting the decriminalization of "sex work" and the very lucrative commodification of women.

Some countries, like Canada, are considering adopting legislation that would impact society as

a whole in response to the demands of a minority who characterizes prostitution as a matter of choice. Contrary to media messages and the present trend in favour of liberalizing prostitution, many feminist researchers from different perspectives question the advisability of such a step. Their concern stems from the fact that, as most studies clearly show, the majority of women in prostitution would get out if they could.

This essay[1] seeks to present recent feminist analyses and relies on facts rather than subjective testimony, which should not be considered sufficient evidence of the need to legitimize the sex industry, contrary to what some self-proclaimed spokespersons for all prostituted women would have us believe. There is a continuum between local prostitution and international trafficking in women for the sex trade, as well as between child and adult prostitution. Organized crime imports and exports prostituted persons in order to continuously offer their customers new "products" and maximize profits.

Today, many progressive people see no contradiction between the liberalization of prostitution and the rejection of neo-liberalism, which is the key factor behind the exploitation of

women and children, and derives its most lucrative profits from it. Marie-Victoire Louis points out that patriarchal interests are complicit with those of neo-liberalism, and she denounces the unethical stance of those who defend customers by maintaining their absolute right to buy access to women's bodies. Furthermore, there are still too few men and researchers who dare to take a stand publicly against prostitution and pornography, even if many of them are not users of these services. Such silence is the ideal context for the unlimited expansion of the sex industry and the gender power imbalances that go along with it.

Feminists take the position that prostitution is part of the sexual oppression of women and constitutes a human rights violation. They call for its abolition and the criminalization of clients and pimps. They do not believe that the majority of women in prostitution have freely chosen this way of making a living. In its study on prostitution, the Conseil du statut de la femme[2] (CSF 2002), a Quebec government organization that advocates for women's rights and equality, notes that 92 percent of women would get out of prostitution if they were able to do so.

For former French prostitute Agnès Laury (1981), defining prostituted women as "merchandise sold by men to men" more closely reflects the reality. Women cannot claim to have fundamental rights over their bodies in conditions that so clearly violate respect for the dignity and integrity of the person as recognized by the *Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others*, adopted on December 2, 1949 by the United Nations.

Can one truly speak of "voluntary prostitution" when the majority of prostituted women are recruited around the age of thirteen on average and made vulnerable by their violent environment, poverty, unemployment and drug addiction? Richard Poulin (2004) has ably described the process of dissociation that must take place in order to produce "prostitutable" human merchandise. The majority of prostituted women undergo forced initiation by pimps or street gangs to depersonalize them until they are no longer able to act or think for themselves.

In *La prostitution, un métier comme un autre?*[3], Quebec researcher Yolande Geadah (2003) shows the demagoguery and self-interest that

are implicit in the promotion of decriminalization, not only for women in prostitution but also for pimps and johns, and therefore the right of client-prostitutors[4] to pay for the body of a woman whenever they want. She demonstrates the inherent connection between individual and collective rights and between local prostitution and human trafficking for prostitution and sex tourism. She shows the disastrous consequences that legitimizing the "procurement system" has for the relations between men and women and all social relationships.

For journalist Claudine Legardinier (1996), any notion of morality – in its broader sense – is obscured by the term "sex work," which refers only to the economic dimension. With economics as the only yardstick, people no longer question or recognize the real nature of this activity that has already been acknowledged as tantamount to slavery by the UN (1974). Legardinier cites the sociologist François de Singly, for whom one of the excesses of this purely individualistic society arises from the fact that individual logic masks power imbalances. The argument regarding individual "choice" is based on a concept of freedom tied to power and the

profit motive: it therefore encourages pimping by legitimizing it. "Liberalizing prostitution," writes Legardinier, "has less to do with liberty than with liberalism".

The use of the phrase "forced prostitution" in international texts gives credence to the notion of "voluntary prostitution" resulting from individual choice. In claiming to fight against "trafficking," the "sex work" advocacy groups are seeking essentially to legitimize prostitution by denouncing extreme cases of violence or abuse only. This, for Legardinier, amounts to condoning the coercion, violence and abuse that are at the root of prostitution.

The promotion of "sex work"

In their struggle to abolish prostitution, feminists have been confronted since the 1970s by other groups defending and promoting "sex work." These groups grew out of the campaign to prevent the spread of AIDS amongst prostituted individuals and are funded by all levels of government. They have sprung up in many countries and include Stella in Montreal, Cabiria in France and Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE) in California. Under the guise of offering help

to those in prostitution, these organizations call for the complete decriminalization of prostitution. Thus, in reality, pro-prostitution groups become the allies of international procurement networks that want to normalize global trafficking in women and children for the purpose of prostitution, as has been done in the Netherlands, Germany and Australia.

Because these groups receive the largest share of government research grants, they have the means to become much more organized than groups that oppose the commodification of women and children. In 2004, the Quebec Ministry of Health gave Stella an award of excellence for publishing "*Guide XXX,* written for "sex workers," and "*L'Art du strip-tease,*" aimed at preparing those in prostitution to deal with undesirable situations. The government has thus demonstrated that it prefers to alleviate certain consequences of prostitution superficially than to work to eliminate it. In this way, it does not risk upsetting the powerful sex trade lobbyists who are calling for total decriminalization and who also contribute to electoral campaigns (Audet 2004).

In May 2005, the Public Health Agency of Canada provided Stella with $270,000 to organize a four-day session on the decriminalization and

"professionalization" of "sex work" (Carrier 2005). Micheline Carrier also refers to the report entitled *EU Financial Support for Projects and Organizations that Advocate the Legalization and Regulation of Prostitution"* presented by Jenny Wennberg to the European Parliament, in collaboration with Marianne Eriksson (2002). According to this report, the European Union granted millions of euros to organizations that, under the guise of fighting AIDS, openly support the sex industry and promote prostitution as a woman's right.

In this debate, all the terms used present pitfalls, particularly "rights," "free choice" and "sex workers." French researcher Marie-Victoire Louis, who has worked for many years to eliminate the "pimping system" and all forms of violence against women, stressed the important role that manipulating the vocabulary plays in influencing attitudes and paving the way for prostitution to be normalized. She states that:

> The 'right to self-determination' of women replaces their 'freedom,' the 'empowerment' of women replaces their 'rights,' and the concept of 'sexual rights', in all its ambiguity, opens the door to the commercialization of sex (Louis 1999).

Known for her rigorous research, Louis concludes that:

> Control over people's bodies is without a doubt the main issue in all societies, with control over women's bodies being the most fundamental. [...] Prostitution is the permanent, codified institutionalization through which men find reassurance by dominating others (Louis 1994).

In a manifesto entitled *Abolir la prostitution*[5], she reiterates her position:

> The prostitution system is abhorrent because it postulates that certain human beings are not an end in themselves and are only a means to be used by others. It must be abolished, since freedom cannot exist as long as it is legally and institutionally denied to one person (Louis 2003).

The school of thought that advocates the complete liberalization of prostitution is currently focusing much of its energy on discrediting feminists who oppose it, by describing their views as moralistic and accusing them of victimizing and stigmatizing women in prostitution. Of course, these feminists are in no way responsible for the

conditions endured by prostituted women; nor are they responsible for the hostility of people who see their neighbourhoods transformed into an open market for women and drugs. Do we really want to legitimize crime simply because we have not been successful in eradicating it (Audet 2002)?

Groups like Stella and Cabiria try to denigrate prostituted women and survivors of prostitution who denounce violence by johns and pimps. A handful of spokespersons for these organizations throughout the world claim to speak for all prostituted women, who supposedly want nothing more than to be allowed to "work" in peace. The numerous stories of prostituted women who have broken the conspiracy of silence point to humiliation of every kind, theft, physical and sexual assault, and the Russian roulette of unprotected sexual intercourse.

Those speaking on behalf of the sex industry present elite escorts as models of success. Nelly Arcan's book (2000), entitled *Putain*[6], crudely shows the reality of these high-class prostitutes, who remain subject to the same unlimited oppression of their bodies. Even though some of them manage to survive relatively well, the bottom line is that they are never able to deter-

mine the rules of the game because the men who benefit from their "sexual services" impose their own priorities and choices.

Groups calling for the complete decriminalization of prostitution do not hesitate to resort to intimidation to silence their opponents, claiming that only those involved in prostitution can have a credible position on the issue. In fact, the expression "those involved in prostitution" automatically excludes prostituted women and feminists advocating for the abolition of prostitution. The arguments of pro-decriminalization groups give the impression that it is feminists, and not the prostitution system, that should be blamed for the stigmatization of prostituted women. According to Yolande Geadah, such a position reflects the total relativism characterizing our post-modern era: there is no hierarchy of values, and all individual opinions have equal merit. The majority of feminist researchers on this topic strongly challenge the argument that women should show solidarity regardless of the choices made by individual women. In Geadah's opinion:

> Such a position supposes that the feminist movement has abandoned any critical judgment where women are concerned, even when

> women adopt strategies or positions that go against their collective interests and jeopardize important feminist gains (Geadah 2003).

Who is really represented by these groups promoting prostitution as a new "lifestyle," a new stage in the development of women's sexuality in which women are able to freely assert themselves and blossom? What makes these groups' stories more credible than those of the overwhelming majority of prostituted women who, according to numerous studies (Dufour 2004; Farley 2003; CSF 2002; Marcovich 2002; Dworkin 1997; MacKinnon 1993), want to get out of the industry? History shows that there have always been oppressed individuals ready to adopt the dominant point of view in order to escape the fate of others in their position and reap immediate personal benefits. The interests at stake are huge and one can safely assume that all possible means (including propaganda) will be used to promote legislation legitimizing "sex work" and the commodification of women.

Finally, the only feminists being attacked are those who refuse to believe that the total decriminalization of prostitution will bring all the benefits anticipated by the associations of "sex

workers" and solve the issues relating to public health, the safety of women in prostitution, organized crime, international sex trafficking and the risks inherent in street prostitution or brothel work. Well-researched studies (Jeffreys 2003; Raymond 2003) on the situation in countries that have legalized prostitution, such as the Netherlands and Australia, draw the opposite conclusion. As Richard Poulin (2004) abundantly demonstrates in his essay, the complete decriminalization of prostitution would essentially benefit pimps and clients, who care little about the fact that sex in this context is a mechanical action, devoid of reciprocity and responsibility: their goal is for as many of them as possible, whatever their social status, to be able to freely buy or sell power over a woman.

Marie-Victoire Louis maintains that any reference to "voluntary" prostitution supports the prostitution system and reveals the true purpose of the pro-liberalization "sex work" groups, namely to promote the interests of pimps and johns. She points to their lack of ethics, typical of the vanguard of the combined interests of patriarchy and of neoliberalism.

According to Cecilia Hoffman (2002), of the Coalition against Trafficking in Women, radical

feminist analysis considers prostitution to be the keystone of the patriarchal control and subjugation of women. Hoffman says that prostitution has a negative effect not only on the women and girls involved in it, but on all women: prostitution constantly reinforces the patriarchal definition of women, as existing primarily to service men sexually.

Groups promoting "sex work" invoke the right to do this work, which is presented as a rational occupational choice. They also argue that every man, in any circumstance and whatever the price, must have access to sex. Hoffman considers these positions a total rejection of any critical analysis and a refusal to assign any responsibility to prostitution clients, who are the linchpin of the prostitution system. This amounts to defending male sexual practices and privileges.

The claim that women freely choose to enter into prostitution ignores not only the social, economic and political structural imbalances but also the sexual relationships of domination between men and women, which form the backdrop for these choices and decisions. It places even less value on the obvious fact that

the male clients of prostitution do not want to know if the human merchandise they are buying consents to the transaction: they just don't care. The declared consent of some women may thus be detrimental to all the other women and girls who in no way consent to their sexual exploitation. Slavery could have been justified in the same way, using the testimony of the few slaves who claimed to be happy with their lot.

According to Cecilia Hoffman, sexuality clearly has been and remains a political battleground in the continuing war on women, as is clear from practices such as rape, female genital mutilation, lack of access to contraception, discrimination against lesbians, pornography, and even the most extreme, "snuff" films, in which sexual acts end in the actual death of the woman. In this war, prostitution is a key battlefield, where women in general are seen as no more than their sex organs, their humanity is denied and they are subjected to the most inhumane actions.

True fundamental rights for women start with the right not to be victims of gender discrimination, which constitutes the basis of all human rights. Prostitution violates this right because it is a system of flagrant discrimination against a

group placed in sexual servitude by and for the benefit of another group. It is an undeniable historical fact that the overwhelming majority of prostituted persons are women and girls.

Hoffman stresses the need to acknowledge that prostitution is not simply a part of the larger system of patriarchal subjugation of women: it is a cornerstone of that system. Feminists have a duty, she writes, to imagine a world without prostitution, just as we have learned to imagine a world without slavery. Gender relationships must be restructured in such a way that sexuality can once again become an intimate human experience and cease to be a commodity that can be bought or sold.

In her article "Ten Reasons for Not Legalizing Prostitution", Janice G. Raymond, cofounder of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), shows how the sex industry uses the alleged distinction between voluntary and forced prostitution to argue for the legalization of prostitution, pimping and brothels, and to gain legal status and more security. Accepting this distinction would mean placing the onus on women who lodge complaints against pimps to prove that they were "forced" into prostitution. How

would these marginalized women ever be able to prove they were brought into prostitution against their will? If they had to prove that they were subjected to force in their recruitment or in their "working" conditions, very few of them would seek justice and very few aggressors would be prosecuted.

As Raymond points out, women in prostitution must continually lie about their lives, their bodies and their sexual responses. Lying is part of their job definition when a customer asks, "Did you enjoy it?" The very edifice of prostitution is built on the lie that women "like it". Some prostitution survivors have stated that it took them years after leaving prostitution to acknowledge that prostitution wasn't a free choice, because to deny their capacity to choose was to deny themselves.

There is no doubt, Raymond argues, that a small number of women say they choose to be in prostitution, especially in public contexts orchestrated by the sex industry. In the same way, some people say they choose to take dangerous drugs such as heroin. However, even when people choose to take dangerous drugs, we still recognize that this kind of drug use is harmful to them and most people do not seek to

legalize heroin. In this situation, it is harm to the person, not the consent of the person that is the governing standard.

It is in academic circles that one most often encounters the free choice argument. Lilian Robinson (2002), professor of feminist studies at Concordia University in Montreal and director of its Simone de Beauvoir Institute, maintains that every line of work entails its share of exploitation and that women have the right to choose their occupation. Sex workers, like other women, have the right to health and safety. She even wonders how this work in itself is more dangerous for women than unhealthy sweatshops.

A young feminist, Minni Alakkatusery, who coordinated a forum on prostitution at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) in May 1996, thinks that people enter into prostitution voluntarily and by choice. In her opinion, "the problem is that women in prostitution are invisible, unheard, and unacknowledged. That explains why it is so easy to violate their rights: if their choice were acknowledged, they would be less exploited." Criminologist Marie-Andrée Bertrand, while committed to the abolition of trafficking in underage girls, is against interfering

in the free choice of adult women. Others should not judge them, she says, if they choose to earn a living by selling sexual services. For another researcher, Frances Shaver, a sociologist at Concordia University who works with prostituted women in Montreal, Toronto and San Francisco, "it is the conditions in which these women work that are deplorable, not their work" (Navarro 1996).

How can anyone think that liberalizing prostitution would improve the lives of prostituted women? One could say about prostitution what Iranian author Chahdortt Djavann (2003) says about the argument of personal freedom used to justify wearing the veil: "If today young Jews started to wear the yellow star saying, 'It's my choice, or if young Blacks decided to wear chains on their hands and feet saying 'It's my choice,' wouldn't society react?"

What should we do then when some women say that they have found freedom in the commodification of their bodies and seek to impose their personal experience as acceptable for society as a whole?

The concept of "sex worker" is used to counter feminist opposition to the global marketing of

women. Customers would be more than happy to believe that it is by choice, even by desire, that women enter into prostitution, and not out of necessity as all the studies show. The abolition of prostitution would require rethinking the social, economic and sexual domination by men and taking immediate steps to deal with poverty and violence against women. This would help provide prostituted women with the aid and protection they need to develop strategies to resist pimps and dealers (often one and the same) and to sensitize and dissuade customers.

Organizations promoting complete decriminalization present prostitution as a legitimate free choice, even a form of resistance and emancipation. They argue that it is contrary to the dominant model of conjugal and reproductive sex, and that it provides financial autonomy.

Advocates of prostitution as an expression of freedom often cite Simone de Beauvoir (1949) who, in *The Second Sex*, had this to say about the prostituted women of ancient times:

> Beginning with that sex which gives them over to the male as objects, they become the subjects. Not only do they make their own living like men, but they exist in a circle that is almost exclusively masculine, free in beha-

viour and conversation, they can attain [...] to the rarest intellectual liberty.

But those who seek comfort in such quotes fail to mention that in fact de Beauvoir paradoxically maintains that a sexual encounter without mutual desire can only be degrading, that the person who consents to it commits a moral wrong, and that prostitution cannot be a road to freedom enabling women to escape their fate and act as free subjects.

Like many other academics, including Daniel Welzer-Lang, a leading figure in the Cabiria group in Lyon, the University of Ottawa's Cécile Coderre and Colette Parent (2001), whose arguments are frequently cited by the Stella group, claim that they are above the fray and that they support neither abolitionism nor total decriminalization. On the thinking of Simone de Beauvoir concerning prostitution, they write: "Through these different faces emerge women as subjects and not ultimate symbols of female subordination." They allegedly want to deconstruct the images not only of the victim and the all-powerful rebel, but also of the autonomy, on the one hand, and the exploitation, on the other, of women in prostitution.

They feel it is important to show "the areas of freedom and autonomy where they [prostituted women] are being subjects in their own lives." And they strive to "go beyond the simplistic polarization that too often characterizes studies on this topic". Such researchers thus open the door to the decriminalization of prostitution, including the activities of customers and pimps, using a concept of freedom that fails to take into account the sexual relationships of domination in the patriarchal and capitalist society we live in.

Many feminist scholars question such a position. For instance, Yolande Geadah states that this way of seeing things totally ignores the violations of women's dignity and integrity. It creates the illusion that the mere acknowledgement of prostitution as a legitimate economic activity would eliminate the problems of stigmatization, violence and coercion linked to prostitution. Geadah calls for a distinction to be made between the practical, individual and short-term interests of a few women, on the one hand, and the strategic long-term interests of prostituted and non-prostituted women, on the other.

Groups supporting liberalization of "sex work" connect their demands with feminist struggles for

the recognition of lesbian rights and free access to abortion. For feminists, recognition of abortion rights or lesbianism has nothing to do with the exploitation and sexual domination of women, either individually or collectively. The right to enter into prostitution simply has nothing in common with the rights of lesbians, the right to divorce or the right to have an abortion.

Many lesbians struggle for acknowledgment of their identity, whereas being in prostitution in no way constitutes an identity. Women can leave prostitution, but lesbians cannot change their sexual orientation. Lesbians are striving to regain control over their sexuality and bodies, whereas prostitution takes all of this away from women and turns them into commodities at the disposal of men.

Untold consequences for relations between men and women

Because the debate tends to be quickly reduced to its strictly legal aspects, many feminist scholars try to take a broader perspective, by emphasizing the human, social, political and ethical aspects of prostitution, and to situate the issue in the present context of globalization. They tirelessly

point out that prostitution amounts to sexual exploitation that violates the physical and mental integrity of the women involved in a myriad of ways, whether they "consent" to it or not.

There are enormous social consequences for women in prostitution as well as for relations between men and women and all love relationships in general. When human beings have repeated impersonal sexual relations, totally devoid of feelings, they dissociate from their bodies and emotions. This emotional desensitization can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts. The portrayal of prostitution as a normal and inevitable social fact, freely consented to by women, recreates a power imbalance in favour of men who are made insecure by the feminist questioning of love relationships. These men then profit from the overall commercialization of sexuality.

Accused by "sex work" advocates of moralizing, prudery and censure, a number of feminist authors, including Pascale Camirand and Yolande Geadah in Quebec, note that society's ethics have evolved from the moral condemnation and repression of prostituted persons to the principle that the human body is inalienable. Fundamentally, we need to choose between

individual freedom for a minority and collective freedom for thousands of women and children. We must take the necessary steps to eradicate prostitution and the patriarchal system it is part of in order to free women and children from the sexual exploitation that violates their physical and mental integrity. As early as the 1970s, American sociologist Kathleen Barry (1979), a pioneer in the struggle to abolish prostitution, spoke of "valueless individualism" and argued for an ethical system "that improves the human being instead of demeaning it, and fosters a positive interpretation of human life, not a destructive and dehumanized one."

Pascale Camirand (2004), a philosopher and ethicist, argues that "one should not judge people, but one may judge the actions and decisions made by people." She insists that prostitution is not a private sexual act but a public one. It therefore raises political and social issues about the ethics of sexuality. Camirand suggests that the proper question is whether society can legitimately consider as just and acceptable the relinquishment of pleasure or desire, or of any other emotion or emotional expectation, in return for monetary compensation for services rendered.

By framing the question in these ethical terms, she emphasizes three entitlements that she considers important: to feel desire, to have pleasure, and to experience oneself as a sexual subject and therefore master of one's desires and pleasure. She arrives at the inevitable conclusion that the practice of prostitution violates all three.

Pascale Camirand argues that viewing the debate on prostitution from a perspective of feminist and humanist ethics would broaden the values beyond the strict assertion of one's freedom with the consent of another person. It would also raise the question of whether, from the deep subconscious to the most lucid awareness, prostitution is not a crime against oneself as well as against another. Women, as she notes, have been the sexual objects of men since the beginning of time. Today, it is up to women to become the subjects of their sexuality and regain control over their bodies, desires and pleasure. Prostitution is not just another type of work: it is a manifestation of the oppression of women, and consumers of prostitution commit a crime against the sexual integrity of all women. If we lived in an egalitarian and feminist society, Camirand muses, if women could legislate the

ethics of social and political sexuality, what choices would they make?

According to French ex-prostitute Agnès Laury (1981), "in order to leave prostitution, women need the unshakeable determination not to go back to the street, help with their situation and, above all, complete removal from their environment. In short, they must shift from the role of victim to that of 'survivor,' that is, women who refuse and struggle." It is high time to break the silence surrounding the role played by consumers of sexual services, by asking if they are not in fact buying the right to sexual violence and the discretionary power over it. This is not a puritan perspective but rather a matter of fundamental ethics concerning the commodification of human beings. Is it not more appropriate to invoke this principle and place freely accepted limits on the marketing of sexuality and reproduction, as we have done for incest and slavery, rather than advocate for the right to sell one's body?

For feminists, legitimizing prostitution means accepting a sexist and racist industry founded on class privilege. In her interactional field research carried out in Lille from 1990 to 1997, sociologist

Stéphanie Pryen (1999) found that the differences in social treatment reserved for women in "high class" versus "street" prostitution reflect the social differences between call girls and streetwalkers and between the customers of each category. The social relationships involved in prostitution are not just sexual in nature but also hierarchical and class-bound. Even if the various forms of prostitution have in common an exchange of money for sexual services, the conditions under which the transaction is carried out depends on the social position of the individuals involved.

Notes

1. This essay was first published in an abridged version as an afterword to Richard Poulin's book *La mondialisation des industries du sexe – Prostitution, pornographie, traite des femmes et des enfants*. I have made a number of changes and additions.
2. The Council on the Status of Women.
3. "Prostitution, an Occupation Like Any Other?"
4. In this essay, I use the term "prostitutor" to designate the "client" of prostitution and to underline the key role he plays in the pimping system. Without the demand for paid sexual "services," prostitution would not exist.
5. "Abolish Prostitution"
6. "Whore"

2

The Procurers

In his book entitled *La tyrannie du plaisir*[1], Jean-Claude Guillebaud, one of the signatories of a manifesto for the abolition of prostitution (2000), describes how the stand in favour of decriminalizing the sex industry has been co-opted by commercial interests. He considers this development very important because it changes and compromises meaning.

> From sex shops to mail-order catalogues, from the subculture of pornographic films to that of the Internet or the "Minitel rose"[2], all those selling their products and services use a spiel about the need to be 'liberated' that sounds like a seductive version of the credos of the 1970s (Guillebaud 1998).

Guillebaud predicts that these kinds of arguments will be used to denounce the "moral order." Money will play an increasing role in organizing and manipulating the pro-prostitution rallies and protests publicized by the media. Every attempt to curb the sex trade will be denounced as a manifestation of puritanism that limits freedom of expression. Who would suspect, asks Guillebaud, that the media reporting on these "progressive" protests has been corrupted by the money generated by this same industry? While posing as alterglobalists, groups advocating for decriminalization are actually serving the interests of capitalism and organized crime.

Guillebaud also shows how traditional sexual morality is accused of being codified in such a way as to conflict with the principles of free trade. He concludes that while sexual transgression was in the past condemned by bourgeois capitalism, it is now authorized, justified, exploited and protected by this same capitalism, renamed "liberalism."

> We have reached the point where the dominant classes see their interest in liberating sexuality in the form of codified genital consumption, of devalued and manipulated sexuality resulting

> in stronger social integration than was the case with the brutal repression at the start of the last century. For capitalists, it is clear that today's permissive disorder is more profitable than moral order (Guillebaud 1998).

What a wonderful answer to those apologists who see prostitution as a transgressive way of life! Nothing could be more totally in tune with the law-and-order values of neo-liberalism, concludes Guillebaud.

The International Labour Organization and the sex industry

In 1998, the International Labour Organization (ILO) published a report supporting the legalization of prostitution and stated that "official recognition would be extremely useful in order to expand the taxation net to cover numerous lucrative activities which are linked to the sex trade" (Lim 1998). Thus, the ILO openly admits that prostitution has become a full-fledged industry that contributes directly or indirectly to national employment, revenues and economic growth!

American researcher Janice G. Raymond (1998) criticizes the report, which is used all over the

world to justify and encourage the channelling of women into "sex work," in order to improve the unemployment statistics and to tax women who are desperately trying to survive. As in Latin America, the impact of certain macroeconomic policies in some Asian countries provides these governments with seemingly rational arguments to foster the development of the sex industry.

The ILO, notes Raymond, seriously underestimates the exploitation and violence that prostituted women are subjected to. The organization denies this harm when it claims that only 20 percent of women are mistreated and in some way enslaved. She also emphasizes that the extreme violence endured by women in prostitution does not happen only in developing countries. An American study of 55 survivors of prostitution showed that:

> 78% were victims of rape by pimps and buyers an average of 49 times a year; 84% were the victims of aggravated assault and were thus horribly beaten, often requiring emergency room attention and hospitalization; 49% were victims of kidnapping and transported across state lines; 53% were victims of sexual abuse and torture ; and 27% were mutilated

According to Raymond, the ILO report can be considered "an economic anointment of the sex industry." It even seems to regard human rights concerns about prostitution as an impediment to recognition of the sex industry. It actually states that "the policy issue cannot be seen only from the perspective of the welfare of individual prostitutes":

> A stance focusing on individual prostitutes tends to emphasize moralistic and human rights concerns, which are undoubtedly important, but which will not have a major impact on changing or reducing the [sex] sector.

While the ILO report is not concerned with the individual needs of prostituted women, it certainly takes into account those of the customers. In fact, the report's recommendations explicitly support the view that men need sex and have the right to obtain it, even if they must purchase a female body for the purpose.

For more than a decade, women's groups around the world have sought a more accurate measurement of the contribution of women to national economies, by proposing that national statistics include activities such as caring for children and family members, doing housework,

cooking and shopping, which are all activities traditionally done by women. Raymond argues that the ILO's current willingness to recognize prostitution as a valid profession will have the effect of legitimizing the whole sex industry as an economic sector and will lead governments to abdicate all responsibility and commitment to provide women with decent and lasting employment.

Instead of seeing prostitution as a good job opportunity for poor women, Raymond feels that we need to include these women in the mainstream economy of their countries. She believes that prostituted women need social services, educational opportunities and economic alternatives, that is, genuine recognition that will offer them choices other than a life of prostitution. These women need income-generating projects that will provide a decent living and jobs that do not condemn them to sexual and economic exploitation. Raymond invites women to state loudly and clearly that they have a fundamental right to be free from all forms of sexual exploitation and that women and girls are entitled to their integrity and sexual autonomy.

The effects of legalization in Australia

Sheila Jeffreys (2003), who has studied the Australian experience, considers that legalization is a step backward. Instead of bridging the gap between the public and women in prostitution, legalization increases it because local authorities, even if they are opposed to the idea, do not have the right to refuse a permit to a brothel, provided certain conditions are met, The state-backed prostitution system tramples democratic rights. Legalization does not solve public health problems since only the prostituted women, and not their customers, are "subjected" to periodic medical examinations. Here again, it is the woman's health that is put at risk, since roughly 40 percent of johns refuse to wear condoms.

To those who argue that decriminalizing prostitution will limit the power of organized crime by forcing everyone to act openly and lawfully, Jeffreys answers that:

> Where legalisation is introduced there always seems to be an illegal sector which is considerably larger than the legal sector. In Victoria, estimates from the police and the legal brothel industry put the number of illegal brothels at 400, four times more than

> the legal ones. [....] There is evidence for the corruption of police, the magistracy, the judiciary, lawyers and politicians in relation to prostitution in some published sources and in the Royal Commission reports. [...] There is evidence to suggest that the practice of giving hotshots (heroin overdoses) has been used by police involved in the prostitution industry to eliminate troublesome women (Jeffreys 2003).

Moreover, decriminalization neither increases the safety of prostituted women nor diminishes the level of "ordinary" violence by customers; nor does it reduce the constant danger of rape, assault and murder to which the women are exposed. In some brothels, there are alarm buttons, but help comes only after the aggression. Once the door is closed, it is impossible to protect the women. Those who engage in sadomasochistic practices usually play the "submissive" role and their bodies can be knifed, pierced or branded with a red hot iron. As Jeffreys points out, this violence is perfectly legal and the women have no recourse since it is precisely what they are paid for. Furthermore, they risk being fined by their employer if they refuse the request of a client they deem dangerous.

Street prostitution continues in spite of the existence of legal brothels where the women might believe they would be safer, even if it is not the case. Violence, drug addiction and conflict with local residents are steadily increasing. The majority of prostituted women have no fixed address and are addicted to drugs. It is no exaggeration to say that since prostitution was legalized in Australia, certain areas of cities have become devoted entirely to unrestricted male violence against women.

Again contrary to the claims of pro-prostitution advocates, full decriminalization leads to an increase in the sex trafficking of women because legal and illegal brothels experience ever-growing demand. Sex entrepreneurs (pimps) prefer trafficked women from the international sex trade because they are more vulnerable and therefore more profitable. Traffickers sell these women to brothels for $15,000 each. To reimburse this debt, the women have to have sex with roughly 800 men.

Not only does decriminalization of the "sex industry" not reduce violence against women in prostitution, it creates a culture of prostitution throughout society. For men to buy sexual services is seen as normal. Not surprisingly, when

paying for sex becomes commonplace, the status and living conditions of women in general is affected, since they can all to some extent be considered potential prostitutes.

With examples from a 2003 New Zealand prostitution law, US psychologist and researcher Dr. Melissa Farley has also shown the logical inconsistencies in laws sponsoring prostitution and demonstrated that the physical, emotional, and social harms of prostitution are not decreased by legalization or decriminalization (Farley 2004).

Canada and trafficking in strippers

This "prostitutionalization" of society is a fact not only in Southeast Asia and Australia: Canada also engages in the sex trafficking of women and children (Audet 2004). On November 27, 2004, a scandal involving Romanian dancers was widely reported in the Canadian media. The public learned that immigration officers responsible for granting visas to strippers, described as "exotic dancers", were requiring them to furnish completely nude photos of themselves giving their show. The opposition in the House of Commons immediately called for

the resignation of the Minister of Immigration, blaming her for having covered up an apparent case of blatant sex trafficking of women, including many girls, mostly from Romania and other eastern European countries.

According to the Minister and her spokespersons, "Canadian women no longer wanted to do this kind of work." She cited a dire shortage of lap dance "professionals" to justify recruiting foreign women by granting them special visas. She maintained that there were "needs in the exotic dancing industry" and that the government has "the obligation to answer them." Under this false pretext, immigration officials have worked hand in hand with organized crime to provide the owners of nightclubs with the continuous flow of women that the booming sex industry requires.

Given the nature of international sex trafficking, it can be assumed that Canadian women and children are also regularly exported as "performers" throughout the world in order to satisfy the unquestioned needs of the clients of prostitution and voyeurism. It is clear that, if politicians heed the negative reaction to striptease and decide to abolish this program, club owners, who act as pimps, will go to court to

have it reinstated. Restricting or abolishing the entry of foreign women for this purpose would violate international laws on labour mobility.

According to many experts, the increasing annual growth in the recruitment of foreign strippers to satisfy the needs of the local prostitution system ranks Canada as one of the countries against which the highest number of complaints has been made. Citizenship and Immigration Canada statistics reveal that 25 Romanian strippers entered Canada in 2001, 216 in 2002 and 552 in 2003. If this exponential growth continues, one can easily imagine the situation in a few years. The statistics show that Canada is a destination of choice for sex tourism.

The New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois are critical of this special visa program. Yet, for some years now they have participated in Parliamentary committees studying the feasibility of fully decriminalizing or legalizing prostitution. It is time they took a stand against this oppression, which has already created more victims on a global scale than the African slave trade or the Holocaust.

Organizations working against global sex trafficking of women and children have long

understood these facts, which point to the urgent need for a public debate on prostitution. More and more Canadians are demanding such a debate because they worry that the Canadian government will table legislation to decriminalize prostituted women but also "professionalize" prostitution and decriminalize the activities of prostitution customers and pimps.

Pimps are ever more present

Contrary to the claims of those advocating for the recognition of "sex work," pimps are not disappearing and the majority of prostituted women are not working for themselves in "voluntary" prostitution. Many studies show that pimps have never more tightly controlled the prostitution market throughout the world than they do today. Far from being unusual or limited to a few bad clients, as many contend, the violence that prostituted women suffer is pervasive and directed toward maximizing profits for the sex industry.

> The process of turning people into commodities, i.e., into individuals who can tolerate constant dissociation involves conditioning them all along the line to become no more

than bodies under others' control and using force to transform them into mere trade goods (Poulin 2004).

This is the role played by pimps all over the world. They form a truly international network, consisting of a mosaic of very diverse individuals and organizations that may differ as much in size and scope as major corporations differ from individual entrepreneurs. This pimping network is the main supplier of the 700 sex clubs and brothels in the Netherlands, where prostitution has been legal since October 1, 2000. Since only four percent of these businesses are registered, legalization has obviously failed in its goal of helping women in prostitution.

Prostitution survivor Evelina Giobbe (1993) points out that pimps behave like men who beat their wives. Not only do they resort to physical violence, but they use every means available to isolate their victims. They denigrate them, threaten them, terrorize them psychologically, and abuse them emotionally and sexually. Their attitude is one of ownership and they resort to violence to achieve total control over "their" women. In order to keep them disoriented and make them

totally dependent, pimps move the prostituted women from one sector of the sex industry to another and from one city to another.

The only ones who become rich from prostitution are the pimps. Indeed, the money earned by women in prostitution provides them only with the bare necessities; it is the pimps who pocket most of the earnings. Louise, who has been in prostitution in downtown Montreal, states that once the cost of drugs and clothing is deducted, she has only about $400 a week left. "Drugs are a necessity," she says, "because a person couldn't deal with the reality of prostitution without them. Drugs are like a tool of the trade, just as the salesman needs his suitcase full of samples" (Louise 2002). When a juvenile prostitution ring was uncovered in Quebec City in 2003, it turned out that several levels of procurement linked to organized crime were involved, ranging from street gangs to international networks, providing politicians and businessmen with a variety of ever-younger women.

As commodities, prostituted women are not free to do as they wish: they are the pimp's property. Various studies estimate that between 85 and 90 percent of women in prostitution are

under the control of a pimp. A Bulgarian woman who runs a rehabilitation centre explains: "In 20 days, any woman can be broken and channelled into prostitution." The other 10 to 15 percent are probably part-timers who are addicted to drugs and only do the number of tricks necessary to pay for their fixes. Drug dependency gives pimps enormous power over prostitutes (Chaleil 2002).

The position taken by certain prostituted women calling for the right to work legally in prostitution, Chaleil emphasizes, amounts to wanting to institutionalize an activity that others define as degrading one's entire being. These appeals for legalization of prostitution, which started in Lyon in 1975, were based on the premise that women were in the "trade" of their own free will since there were no longer any pimps involved.

Later, it was learned that those speaking out were in fact under the control of pimps, as are most prostituted women in France, Canada and elsewhere. The most famous of the women, Lulla, confessed a few years later that she "was working for a pimp, the same as 98 percent of the girls". She maintained that she had lied not to protect

her pimp but "to save her skin, since it was too dangerous to tell the truth" (Saubaber 2002).

In Canada, those calling for prostitution to be decriminalized also claim that the majority of prostituted women are "their own bosses," a statement that is challenged by those who provide services to prostituted persons (Marriner 2005).

> It is true that some women can make large amounts. But, in my experience, it works more like this: Young woman is pimped out of a rented apartment by someone else. Client shows up, gives her the money. She walks out of that room, into the next room where a "sitter" is always present, and hands the money to him. Her food, clothes, make-up, drugs, alcohol, etc., are all purchased by the pimp – she is never, ever given cash.

Even if there are cases of women who "run their own business," Sunny Marriner, coordinator of the Young Women At Risk (YWAR) program at the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa, says that they are a small minority of cases and involve women who could leave prostitution if they wanted to:

> Very often, however, they are linked into a behind-the-scenes business and are acting as frontwomen to operate the day-to-day and organize other girls that they recruit. [...] If the 'escorting' is busted by the cops, the young women who are seen as running the operation NEVER "rat out" the guys behind them. They just go do the time and are themselves viewed as the primary pimps.

Marriner goes on to say that the young prostituted women do not have the choice to leave prostitution: most of them have "nowhere to go, no money to rent a motel room to sleep in, they're kicked out/barred from the shelters or wanted so they have to keep a low profile". They work inside and many of them are practically prisoners of the apartments and motels where a pimp has set them up. Marie, who was in prostitution for nine years, states that all the prostituted women in downtown Montreal are under the control of a pimp, whether they walk the street or work out of massage parlours, clubs or escort agencies. In the poorer areas of East Montreal, she adds, it is mostly drug dealers who do the pimping (Marie 2005).

Anthropologist Rose Dufour (2004) states that 85 percent of prostituted persons were victims of

abuse and sexual assault in their youth. Marriner claims that this was the case with all the young women in prostitution she has encountered. In attempting to free themselves from their abusers, they become easy prey for pimps.

The sex industry could never function as profitably as it does were it not for the contracts given to pimps to break down, through violence and intimidation, the young women and children recruited for prostitution. According to Joe Parker (1998), pimps can be divided into three categories, depending on whether they work in the entertainment industry, in the business community or on the street.

Pimps in the entertainment industry work hand in hand with the "businessmen" of the sex industry. They lure young girls with promises of success and wealth in legitimate show business and then draw them little by little into the seedy depths of the sex industry. They have a lot of money, own magazines or newspapers, and produce movies and television shows. They can afford to pay law firms and ad agencies to promote their interests.

The businessmen who pimp control enough financial resources to purchase advertising in all

the media; in exchange, the media promote "sex work" as a new trend and a "sign of the times". Happy hookers are regularly invited to state publicly that they have freely chosen this activity as a way to improve their lives.

In the same way, organized crime, the prime mover behind the sex industry at the local and international levels, usually contributes generously to the electoral funds of political parties. In return, it expects the parties to support liberalizing prostitution laws and to generously subsidize organizations claiming to speak on behalf of all prostituted women and calling for legitimization of the sex industry and total decriminalization of prostitution. Thus, many groups acting as fronts receive "help" to promote this "exciting" way of life, while systematically concealing its dramatic effects on the women and children whose lives are destroyed by the sex industry. They care little that institutionalizing prostitution runs counter to the implicit desire of most prostituted women, who are trying to escape their enslavement (Carrier 2005; Poulin 2004; Wennberg and Eriksson 2002).

By attracting prostitution customers, the owners of bars and clubs featuring nude dancing

act as pimps. They offer work to vulnerable young girls as dancers or hostesses, preparing them to become potential recruits for the sex market. These businessmen, who own adult bookstores, massage parlours, motels and brothels, produce and distribute pornographic material with the help of the legal entertainment industry and street gangs.

Street gangs are the shock troops of the sex industry. Made up of power-hungry petty criminals, they are the underlings in charge of the brainwashing, terror, abuse, rape and murder used to initiate women and children into prostitution and force them to bring in more and more money. When prostitution is decriminalized, these criminals become legitimate businessmen and bosses. Like capitalists, whose values of maximizing profits they share, they are parasites who get rich by exploiting the most vulnerable.

It is obvious that large criminal organizations could not launder the gigantic profits from their criminal activities without the complicity of business and political circles. Money grants huge power to pimps and customers and devalues the women treated as objects for sexual use. Needless to say, the prostitution system would

never have expanded to such an extent without the complicity of all levels of society. According to Poulin (2004),

> we are witnessing the prostitutionalization of entire areas of the world and the "pornification" of the social imagination, with respect to not only our systems of representation but also certain ways of thinking and behaving.

That is a terrifying observation.

Notes

1. "The Tyranny of Pleasure"
2. "Minitel rose" in France is a system similar to the Internet, offered by the phone company for clients of prostitution.

3

Clients and Their Motivations

There is a dearth of research on the clients of prostitution, with only one percent of all the studies on prostitution dealing with this aspect (Perkins 1991). It is the first time that men have received so little attention while being at the heart of a problem, and this shows the extent of male solidarity in wanting to conceal their very unattractive role as pimps and prostitutors.

While the first extensive studies on sexuality (Kinsey in 1948 and Simon in 1972) estimated that one out of two (50 percent) of men had paid for a sexual act at least once, more recent studies suggest that the proportion is about 15 to 20 percent, of whom only 5 to 10 percent are regular

buyers (Legardinier 2000). Since 1980, the largest number of studies on this subject have come from Northern European countries.

In 1984, sociologist Sven-Axel Månsson, of Sweden's Gothenburg University, carried out a study with Annulla Linders for UNESCO entitled "Men in the Sex Trade." Still widely cited, the study shows that men between the ages of 30 and 39 constitute the largest group of clients at almost 40 percent, with 47 percent of them cohabiting with a woman.

Månsson found that 70 percent of prostitution clients can be deemed "occasional" (once or rarely) and 30 percent "habitual" (more than 20 contacts). Occasionals, who purchase sex a few times in their lives, are more receptive to legal measures: that is, the fear of prosecution usually has an effect on them. Habitual buyers are men who, for varying lengths of time during their adult life, frequently buy sex from prostituted women. They are less numerous but end up prostituting a large number of women.

According to Månsson, this latter group of clients has a "sexualized" and "profoundly disturbed" relationship to women. Some of them suffer from major problems of sexual depen-

dency. Turning excessively to prostitution and pornography creates many financial and relational problems for these men on both the personal and professional levels. They tend to project their affective problems onto women and use varying degrees of violence to humiliate and degrade them. This group is probably not very sensitive to legal measures, with the result that prison or fines will not deter them from continuing to purchase sex. Working with these men and helping them solve their problems is certainly a major social work challenge, concludes Månsson.

The sexuality of other clients, a majority of them young, is modelled on mass-produced images of pornography and television entertainment. For these men, anything is possible. They have an essentially mercantile vision of sexuality: sex is a commodity rather than an intimate relationship. Sex is seen above all as an irresistible physical need, a perception which is linked to the archaic patriarchal ideology that defends heterosexual prostitution as an inevitable natural phenomenon.

The term "McSex" has been coined to reflect the thinking by many men that going to a prostitute is "like going to McDonald's: greasy and

quick." These clients see prostituted women – and women in general – as objects, who come to symbolize all women, onto whom they can project all their frustrations.

Max Chaleil (2002), author of a monumental work on prostitution, claims that age (young, middle-aged or old) is a useful way of classifying clients. He observes that, since the closing of the brothels and the relaxation of moral standards, the younger clientele has almost entirely disappeared. However, he emphasizes that prostituted women are wary of young men, who can be dangerous either because they want to have sex without paying or because they are violent and try to steal from them. Statistics also indicate that many of them seek women specializing in sadomasochistic domination.

Prostitution survivor Agnès Laury, explains Chaleil, has a different three-category classification for clients: occasionals, habituals and perverts. Occasional clients are clandestine and unpredictable, and they are dangerous because of their violent behaviour and the potential health risks to which they expose themselves and the women they deal with. On the other hand, another survivor of prostitution, Nicole Castioni (1998), believes that

> habitual customers consider the women they buy sex from as their secret garden, their western, their freedom. That they purchase this freedom at the expense of the freedom of other living beings does not bother them; they are not even conscious of it. They see prostitution as part of the natural order and their own comfort.

Citing the research of Dr. Petiziol and Dr. Torrentino of the University of Rome's neuropsychiatric clinic, Chaleil points out that only 29 percent of prostitution clients exhibit no perversion. Of the remaining 71 percent, 19 percent are sadomasochists, 14 percent are fetishists, 10 percent are voyeurs or interested in three-way sex, 10 percent are homosexual masochists, 9 percent are sadists and, finally, 9 percent are pornography addicts.

Various studies concur that the majority of prostitution clients live in large urban areas, have some level of post-secondary education, place little importance on religion, and are married.

Clients say that relations with prostituted women are less complicated because they remain anonymous and bring relief to a strong libido. When asked about what they derive from this

type of sexual relationship, they talk about comfort, curiosity, convenience, their desire for strong sensations, risk-taking and the attraction of novelty.

According to Sven-Axel Månsson, the motivations of clients have more to do with the relationships between men and women than their sexuality and with the quest for sexual power than the satisfaction of a sexual need. Today, many women refuse to be dominated sexually by men. Men who are unable to accept this change find that in prostitution the old order is restored. Often, says Månsson, the compulsive need to resort to prostitution can be traced back to this relative loss of power. Many men pay for sex in order to be able to play a passive role and not have to acknowledge the needs of their partner.

At the same time, Månsson dispels a number of myths, including the one that prostitution saves relationships. In fact, the figures show that there are more divorces and common-law breakups in cases where men have relations with prostituted women. Also untrue is the notion that there is more prostitution among lonely men: those who have numerous sexual partners are actually more likely to pay for sexual relations.

As for the very popular myth that men have an irrepressible sex drive, social science research has demonstrated that sexuality, just like gender differences, is socially constructed.

It was thought that the sexual revolution would reduce prostitution. Yet, as Månsson shows, it seems that one of the secondary effects of this revolution has been to reinforce the feeling in men that they have a right to unlimited access to sex. Sex has become a commodity rather than remaining a part of personal human relationships. Elvira Banotti (2003) writes that in Italy, the exploitation of women in those prisons called "houses of pleasure" is considered the highest and most moving form of relationship with women. Some writers sing the praises of brothels, describing them as places where women have successfully overcome their enslavement to family and to men, places that have contributed to the evolution of literature, art and civilization. From Banotti's perspective,

> prostitution is part of androlatry and monotheism, of a pornographic culture which prevents women and men from having genuine relationships, of an art which has celebrated mute women, hence portraying women as still life.

Modelling their behaviour on the media and pornography, a growing number of men believe that they are entitled to overstep the norms. The mass-produced illusion of unlimited and available sex instils irresistible fantasies in men about their sexuality and gives them the impression that they never get enough sex. As a result, there is an ever growing market for more and more demanding "sexual services".

Max Chaleil (2002) emphasizes that the massive importation of young foreign girls has triggered an upsurge in demand and attracted new clients. It is increasingly clear that it is the supply that conditions the demand, the goods that develop the clientele. This situation is typical of consumer societies which, by promoting and displaying merchandise, push consumers to purchase beyond their needs (Legardinier 2000).

On the psychological and social levels, clients claim that their relationships with prostituted women solve the problems they encounter in their relationships with women in general. Interestingly, women who have problems relating to men rarely resort to buying sex, which remains a typically male practice. Furthermore, it is impossible to understand what men, and sometimes

women, seek in relationships with prostituted women, if the issue is not put in the context of the sexual relationships of domination that prevail in a given society.

The Internet offers the possibility of homosocial networking among clients who visit certain websites to exchange or sell information about their experiences, contacts and transactions with prostituted women in their own country or abroad. These alliances can be seen as a resurgence of gender privilege, justifying unfettered access to the bodies of women in prostitution.

The reason the role of clients has been studied so rarely probably stems from the fundamental proposition that a group of women must be constantly available to satisfy the sexual needs of men; this assumption has been at the root of all patriarchal societies throughout history. Thus, the client has always remained anonymous and invisible. The prevailing image of the client is based on a vision of an immutable, biologically determined male sexuality. This paradigm denies that sexuality is socially and culturally constructed, which is the only perspective that will enable us to understand and influence it.

Many European and North American men see women's access to legal equality as a loss of

male supremacy. Some react strongly, through regressive and anti-feminist attitudes. Opposed to the changes in women's status, they cling to the old notions of male domination over women. Their reactions reflect a genuine feeling of loss, which translates into a need to be compensated or to act out aggressively against women.

The power of total domination

Any analysis of prostitution must recognize that the act of paying gives customers the power to dominate women. They are choosing a relationship without consequences or emotional involvement, and throughout the history of patriarchy and private property, they have sought to justify and perpetuate the marketing of sexual relationships where they are the absolute masters. As feminists increasingly protest this attitude, pressure is growing in all social spheres from the sex industry and those blindly advocating for its interests. They want market forces to be allowed to dictate supply and demand when it comes to women and children in prostitution.

Historian Florence Montreynaud has long denounced the prostitution system and its double standard, which puts the total burden of

responsibility on prostituted women, without ever questioning the anonymity and impunity that clients enjoy. Montreynaud devotes a section of her book *Amours à vendre*[1] (1993) to "buyers" and denounces the hypocrisy of those who, while publicly condemning prostitution, are assiduous sex customers.

Montreynaud is convinced that fighting prostitution requires some prior reflection on the use of sexuality as an instrument of domination over others, be they men, women or children. In her opinion, prostitution has less to do with sexuality than with the power that can be exercised over others, in this instance the power of men in all societies. Unlimited power and sexual relationships of domination allow every man, regardless of his social class, to turn women and children into objects for his sexual use with total impunity. From a tender age, boys and girls are taught to conform to the sexist stereotypes of female submission and male aggressiveness, thus preparing them to conform to the pornographic, sadomasochistic models that have gradually invaded our culture.

"We live in a consumer society, prostitutes are there to be consumed, I choose and I

pay, that's all," declares a john quoted by Montreynaud. Sexuality has been reduced to a transaction between strangers, not rooted in time, and devoid of attachment and sentiment. In neo-liberal societies, only money counts and it confers full rights: it transforms the person who receives it into a prostitute and the man who pays into a "prostitutor." Nelly Arcan writes eloquently and lucidly about the experience of being in prostitution, stating:

> They do not want to know what I am dying to have them know, that after all there is nothing else but money that one could want from them, and they try to forget that desire is more than the size of their dick, it is more than sucking and sucking, sucking even to death, they do not want to hear that it takes time for desire to build up, at least more time than it takes to extract money from the wallet, they don't understand that this exchange is rendered possible only through a pact that the truth should absolutely not be told and that everything must be done to maintain the illusion that it is possible to feel desire for the first man to come along, even if he is obese and stupid (Arcan 2001).

To those who consider any thought of punishing clients to be evidence of intolerance, the French prostitute Merry answers: "If prostitution is necessary, then all girls should devote a year to it, just as all boys are drafted into military service!" And why not the boys themselves, adds Montreynaud, if social acceptance extends to clients' homosexual needs?

The widespread commercialization of sex engenders a kind of resignation that affects all of society. Governments find neither the money nor the determination to work toward eradicating prostitution, which would entail committing energy and financial resources to actually crack down on pornography, promote non-sexist sexual education, impose penalties for clients and provide assistance for women in prostitution. Society needs to be convinced that people are not born prostitutes, pimps or clients, that change is possible and that we can build a world free of prostitution, just as we were able to abolish slavery in the past.

In an article entitled "La prostitution, un droit de l'homme?"[2] (1999), Florence Montreynaud gives the example of the Swedish government, which has decided that it is not reasonable to

punish the people who sell a sexual service. On the contrary, it wants to help them leave this way of life. Since January 1, 1999, prostitution customers have been liable to fines and six-month sentences. The new act on violence against women prohibits the purchase of "sexual services". Penalties against Swedish clients are among the measures implemented over many years in order to reduce prostitution. In addition, the government took the important step of providing telephone assistance: clients are listened to, encouraged to express their problems and offered in-depth help, either one on one or in a group. Montreynaud emphasizes that the experience of Scandinavian countries is worth examining, since they are the only geographic region where prostitution has decreased in the last twenty years.

In 2004, there were about a hundred people in full-time prostitution in Stockholm, whereas there are thousands in every large city around the world (Poulin 2004). In fact, in her testimony before the Canadian House of Commons' Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws on February 7, 2005, researcher Yolande Geadah pointed out that, not so long ago, Sweden was as ultraliberal

as the Netherlands, and it was in reaction to the increasing level of violence towards prostituted women that Sweden drafted legislation to attack the root cause of prostitution by reducing demand.

Montreynaud wonders why there are no studies or periodic statistical surveys on prostitution customers as a public health issue, including their psychological state and pathologies and the social and economic consequences of their behaviour. The role of clients in perpetuating prostitution is one of the most closely guarded secrets. Nothing is done to hold them accountable for their actions. Johns like to think that women are in prostitution for pleasure and by choice. They are horrified when they discover that the women are subjected to unspeakable violence and that they in fact hate their customers and only want their money.

Montreynaud quotes Dr Suzanne Képès, who confirms that clients feel no remorse:

> They are unaware that they are offending the dignity of another human being. If they feel fear or guilt, it is mainly because they dread scandal. They are prisoners of stereotypes about virility: a 'real man' does not cry, a 'real

man' is capable of having an erection. The more they resort to prostitution, the less able they are to establish a genuine relationship with a non-prostituted woman (Montreynaud 1999).

Sociologist Stéphanie Pryen (1999) points out that the act can appear insignificant to a male client because it is but one of his many activities, whereas the affected woman has her whole life invaded again and again. The transaction even follows her into her private life, which she generally tries to protect with a shroud of secrecy. She is described as being a prostitute, whereas the client is described as having visited a prostitute.

Stéphanie Cordellier (2004) maintains that to try to abolish prostitution without penalizing clients is nonsense. It would be totally illogical to prohibit pimps from selling women and children while giving clients the right, with complete impunity, to purchase them like any other merchandise. Far from penalizing clients, the current situation enables the sex industry to constantly look for ways to attract new customers, in particular women. Those involved stimulate the demand by increasing the supply of "new shipments" from all social classes and from all over

the world. Shortly before her death, Françoise Giroud, former French minister for the Status of Women, declared categorically:

> Prostitution is a male act. Their use of prostituted women should be penalized. The punishment should range from heavy fines to criminal prosecution for repeat offenders, and even imprisonment. Only then would one be able to talk about real action against prostitution (Giroud 2000).

Notes

1. *Love For Sale*
2. "Prostitution, Mankind's Right?" The author plays on the fact that in French, both men's rights and human's rights use the word "homme".

4

Keeping Quiet about the Violence of Prostitution

BY DOING NOTHING to stop those who buy or rent the bodies of women, society is implicitly recognizing their right to do so, by pretending not to know that violence is always inherent in prostitution. Clients pay to violate the intimacy of women and children. In her arguments for penalizing clients, Stéphanie Cordellier (2004) insists that prostitution cannot be dissociated from other forms of violence perpetuated by men against women. Prostitution destroys those who exercise it, and it would be enormously hypocritical and dishonest to hide the clients' role in this destruction.

Prostitution has the same impact as rape on the mental and physical health of its victims.

Of course, not all women who are poor turn to prostitution, and certain factors predispose individuals. For example, the majority of women in prostitution have suffered childhood traumas, such as incest, rape and physical violence. These traumas then create an unconscious desire on the part of the victims to destroy themselves: prostitution becomes the means to do that.

Annie Mignard speaks of the schizophrenic experience of prostitution. She emphasizes that, unlike other occupations where the body is used, prostitution is not an external activity but rather affects the woman's internal integrity and her sexual and overall identity:

> One does not have a body: one is one's body. 'My body is myself.' It is not an object, an instrument, separate from one's being that can be sold, rented, abandoned, or kept for oneself, but the core of oneself. One does not belong to oneself, one is. This is why the rights of ownership over their body-as-object called for by female prostitution advocates seem so misguided to me. This is why all prostitution constitutes a schizophrenic act that is completely unbearable (Mignard 1976).

Sociologist Stéphanie Pryen (1999) also points out that it is difficult to escape the repercussions

of prostitution, which is inherently a physical, psychological, moral and emotional attack on its victims. It inflicts deep wounds on the integrity of their bodies and their very identities, and taints their relationships with others. Even where those in prostitution have not verbalized the desire to leave the industry, it is important not to fall into the trap of supporting their exploitation; we should be in solidarity with individuals who are prostituted, not with their prostitution.

How is it possible to continue to pretend not to know that the majority of individuals who are prostituted have been physically attacked by their pimps or clients (beating, rape, attempted murder, forcible confinement)? Society has finally agreed to penalize rape, thus recognizing that no sexual need can justify the assault and battery of a person. But when will paid rape, which is what prostitution is, finally be penalized?

The fact that prostituted women take money from clients, giving the illusion that they consent to the transaction, means that prostitution is not to be labelled a violent act and clients penalized. Some women in prostitution call it "rape that is bought and sold." Only the recognition of prostitution as a violent act will lead to clients

being penalized, and inversely, criminalization of clients will show that society considers prostitution an unacceptable form of violence against women.

For most researchers, merely holding clients responsible for their actions is not enough. Cordellier (2004) asks whether we would accept a policy to hold rapists responsible that did not include penalizing them. She denounces the failure to consider prostituted women as crime victims. In this society created by men for men, it is as if sexual violence is acceptable as long as it is paid for.

Although all the facts and the first-hand accounts by prostituted women demonstrate clearly that they are victims of violence, groups advocating that prostitution be fully decriminalized deem the term "victim" an insult to prostituted women and an attempt by feminist groups to deny women their freedom and the power that being prostituted gives them. They perpetuate the illusion that prostituted women engage in consensual acts, thereby freeing the clients from any responsibility.

In spite of the efforts of many young parents to change socialization patterns, boys are

generally brought up to believe that women exist only to satisfy their needs and desires (Bouchard *et al* 2005). In this context, pimps simply act as intermediaries to bring about this natural appropriation of women, who, they like to believe, deserve what they get or even like it. By punishing clients, the state would show that it does not accept sexual relationships of domination, which lead to the normalization of violence and dehumanization through pornography and prostitution.

In Sweden, penalizing prostitution clients reduced their numbers by 80 percent. As for the argument that penalization would push prostituted women underground, Cordellier rightly wonders why it is never raised in the context of child prostitution. Customers of that type of prostitution are penalized because everyone is convinced that these minors are victims of unacceptable violence; no one ever suggests that prosecuting the johns would send the prostituted children into hiding. However, once they are 18 years old (or even 12 or 14 in certain countries), we seem to tolerate this violence and even consent to it. The politicians thus avoid having to get to the root of the problem.

Normalizing prostitution

In both right-wing and left-wing countries, and even amongst women's groups, prostitution is generally not considered a serious enough phenomenon to make abolishing it a priority. Submission to violence and slavery is considered acceptable and in keeping with the sexist values promoted by pornography and the neo-liberal culture, whose only aim is profit.

In Quebec, on April 26, 2004, the Conseil permanent de la jeunesse called for an end to sanctions against prostitution and recommended that the prostitution activities of both women and men and their clients be decriminalized, as long as the prostituted individuals were adults. The purported objective was to improve the situation of prostituted women, but the result would be to justify their exploitation by procurer organizations and their customers, who are the ordinary men (our fathers, husbands, brothers and sons) frequenting prostituted women with impunity and in good conscience.

What message does that position send to teenage girls? Does it mean that anything is permitted if it brings in money? Micheline Carrier, who manages the Sisyphe website, questions

why people who claim they want to prevent young people from becoming involved in street prostitution are calling for the decriminalization of prostitution clients. She wonders if the day will come when

> the employment insurance or income security bureaucrats, citing the need for labour mobility, would refuse benefits to unemployed young women because there are opportunities in brothels in their region, province or country, or even elsewhere in the world (Carrier 2002).

What does it say when the city of Athens, on the eve of the Olympic Games, bragged that an extra 20,000 women in prostitution would be available for the athletes and tourists? The same thing happened in Germany during the 2006 World Cup of Soccer. Before the event even started, the City of Dortmund raced against time to ready wooden cabins to accommodate the revelry between the foreign fans and prostituted women, who were expected to respond quickly to this new clientele (Reuters 2005).

In 2007, the mayor of Vancouver, pro-decriminalization individuals and groups, pimps and johns, New Democratic Party representative

Libby Davies, and other neo-liberals supported a project to create a brothel, which would be legal and run by women in prostitution, for the 2010 Olympic Games. The most vulnerable prostituted women in British Columbia, that is, aboriginal women, were not consulted on this project aimed at forcing the federal government's hand to obtain what has previously been out of the question: total decriminalization of prostitution.

Once again, those claiming to speak for all prostituted women are saying that the only thing they want is to earn money without being harassed and "saved" against their will. One would think that feminist abolitionists, police forces and the court system were mainly responsible for violence against prostituted women. Exonerating clients, pimping networks and traffickers in this way is incredibly cynical and fundamentally dishonest.

In the name of men's reportedly imperative sexual needs, are we in the process of envisioning prostitution as an acceptable career for girls? Are we going to add training in prostitution to the school curriculum, in order to teach women how to better respond to the fantasies of clients,

how to transform themselves into malleable and interchangeable merchandise, in order to satisfy the needs of this growing world market that is more profitable for organized crime and to procurers than arms and drug sales (Geadah 2003)?

Increasing the supply for women

For about the last ten years, we have also witnessed a trend in literature, film and the sex industry toward expanding the market, by heavily promoting "equality" between men and women in the production and the consumption of pornography and the use of men, women, children and transsexuals through sex tourism, swingers' clubs and mixed Eros Centres for singles or couples.

Florence Montreynaud suggests that this trend will lead to more women clients in the future (1993). The same methods produce the same results. If, for a growing number of women, sex comes to replace love and be considered a service that can be bought, devoid of feelings or concern about the consequences for the other person, market forces will apply and increased demand will lead to increased supply. As part of sex tourism, single women of all ages from

rich countries can now buy the sexual services of young men in poor countries.

Claudine Legardinier also sounds the alarm over the tendency of the prostitution market to create new needs, striving constantly to increase supply and demand. Although the existence of brothels serving women is anecdotal, it is clever

> in that the exploitation of women, which is at the root of prostitution, is tied to the notion that it is their "right" to have the same access as men. The rampant exploitation of everyone by everyone now takes on the appearance of equality, which the free markets exploit brilliantly (Legardinier 2000).

The "pornification" of society

According to Cecilia Hoffman (2002), some pro-prostitution advocates seem to eagerly anticipate the day when both men's and women's sexual desires and needs will be adequately "served" by commercial sex. She cites the ironic response of Sheila Jeffreys, who foresees that the only problem will be to find the millions of men and boys willing to be bedded and have women penetrate them with all sorts of objects, or to be photographed in all sorts of ridiculous and degrading positions! Hoffman notes that the prostitution

of men does not weaken the power of men as a class, whereas the prostitution of women directly results from the subordinate status of women and serves to perpetuate it.

Hoffman wonders what kind of sexuality is being expressed when a German client asks a Philippine woman in prostitution to pose for a photo so he can show his friends "the two things that are better in the Philippines": a bottle of beer in the vagina of a woman and the possibility for a group of men to pay a woman so they can simultaneously ejaculate on her. Can the use of increasingly violent images by the pornography industry be considered sexual liberation? Hoffman concludes: although it is certainly an example of freedom of expression, we must consider who this sexuality belongs to and what ideological statements are being made about women? It is really about men affirming their desire to dehumanize women.

Pervasive pornography normalizes violence and gradually displaces all ethical principles and any responsibility for our own acts and their impact on others. In the spring of 2004, we witnessed a terrible example of this when male and female American torturers seemed surprised that they were criticized for their sexual abuse of Iraqi prisoners. Some of them admitted that they

found it amusing to take photos, as if it were a game. Why were they criticized for reproducing what they had seen in so many porno films, where torture and violence, increasingly ending in murder, are constantly associated with pleasure?

The newspaper *Le Monde* noted that the American torturers often used sexual and pornographic simulations to break prisoners' resistance. Their exploits included photos of a pair of smiling soldiers posing in front of a heap of bodies and a prisoner on all fours with electric wires on his genitals, the rape and murder of prisoners, forced masturbation, sodomy, and soldiers behaving "in an inappropriate manner with a corpse" (Guerrin and Lesne 2004). Is it any wonder then that, allegedly out of concern for freedom of expression and tolerance, nobody challenges the constant exposure of boys and girls to an environment tainted by pornography and the prostitution of human beings in the most demeaning ways possible?

As for the female American soldier shown holding a naked prisoner on a leash, French writer Michèle Causse (2004) notes that she was basically being invited to do things to the so-called "liberated" enemy that were relatively similar to what she herself had been subjected to. Causse denounces the attempt to portray the female soldiers involved

as "the subjects of history" when they were actually being further manipulated and used, just as the Iraqi prisoners were deprived of their virility and sense of honour. In fact, there were investigations and trials afterward to deal with the numerous cases of rape by American soldiers of their female colleagues. There were also Iraqi women raped, as well as women and children in other countries occupied by the American military.

In her article "Regarding the Torture of Others" (2004), American writer Susan Sontag concludes that if the soldiers in question behaved in this manner, it was because they were led to believe that those over whom they had total control deserved to be humiliated and tortured, because they belonged to an inferior race or religion. In the case of prostitution, men pay for the "right" to inflict such brutality on women. Is it not reasonable to think that if men, in a prostitution context or otherwise, are allowed to attack, rape and, more and more often, kill women, it is because boys and girls are socialized to believe that women are an inferior species?

Note

1. Permanent council on youth

5

Towards a World without Prostitution

In Quebec, the Regroupement des Centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel[1] (RQCALACS) took a firm position against the total decriminalization of prostitution during the 2002 women's movement debates as well as before the federal sub-committee that reviewed solicitation laws from 2003 to 2005. The first centres in the Quebec network opened in the 1970s as the feminist movement evolved and helped develop a new perspective on sexual assault.

The association's working paper takes the following position on prostitution:

> Calling women 'sex workers' plays down the violence, poverty and oppression that leads

> women and girls into prostitution and traps them there. It gives legitimacy to the sex industry as just another economic sector instead of a system of exploitation (RQCALACS 2002).

The association maintains that prostitution is part of the sexual exploitation of women and cannot, under any circumstance, be considered a legitimate way to achieve economic independence. Moreover, prostitution is a form of violence primarily directed against women and constitutes a violation of their basic human rights. Individuals in prostitution should therefore not be discriminated against in any way. In 2005, the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres (CASAC), the umbrella group to which Quebec's CALACS belong, stated in a public resolution that for them "prostitution is violence against women".

In France, the struggle for a prostitution-free world has come out of mobile clinics like those started by the Mouvement du Nid[2], which has taken the stand that no one has the right to buy sexual services from another individual, even with her or his consent. Created in 1937, the movement is a national network of 30 delegations that works in 28 cities, with approximately 250 active members and 3000 supporters. It also publishes

a magazine entitled *Prostitution et Société* (Pryen 1999) and has a very informative website (http://www.mouvementdunid.org/). Its principal aims are to help both men and women see prostitution as a social phenomenon (and not the result of prostituted individuals' personal problems), prevent prostitution in all its forms, influence public discourse, identify prostitution behaviour and implement reintegration approaches.

In its work, the Mouvement du Nid targets three groups: prostituted individuals, customers and pimps; public opinion and decision-makers, with the aim of permanently changing attitudes towards prostitution in all its forms; and trainers on social issues, to help them develop a comprehensive approach to prostitution in their professional and volunteer responsibilities. The Mouvement does not offer services so much as a path towards liberation. It believes that a true policy to prevent AIDS requires an effective policy to prevent prostitution, with a view to eradicating it.

Beyond the national level, it is important to highlight the exceptional work of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), an international network of feminist groups, organizations and individuals fighting sexual exploitation and

violence against women globally, as both a violation of human rights and a serious form of discrimination. CATW promotes the fundamental rights of women, develops strategies in conjunction with other NGOs and, with international institutions, fosters research on the causes and consequences of prostitution, organizes training and compiles documentation, and supports the victims and survivors of sexual exploitation. In Europe, CATW is represented by the Movement for the Abolition of Pornography and Prostitution and All Forms of Sexual Violence and Sexist Discrimination (MAPP).

In all countries, there are groups of prostitution survivors fighting to end this type of slavery by targeting clients and pimps without whom there would be no prostitution. In San Francisco, for example, a group of women formerly in prostitution have formed Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE), whose aim is to re-educate clients by imposing fines and making them face the women they have always considered consenting objects. What these women tell them shatters the myths about prostitution being a choice and a path to freedom. Prostitution survivors in the Philippines and members of WHISPER (Women

Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt) in the United States are also speaking out against the violence and various forms of humiliation women suffer in prostitution.

Fortunately, groups like Quebec's Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle[3] (CLES) are proposing a different analysis of the experience of prostitution and talking about the fear involved in breaking the law of silence. How can sexual submission to others' wishes be confused with sexual liberation or the expression of one's sexuality? By repeating the same arguments over and over again, pro-prostitution groups are trying to convince us that it is in the interests of the feminist movement to support female enslavement. If they are successful, it is frightening to think what will happen when men no longer need women or even surrogate mothers in order to procreate, and women thrown into the global maelstrom of prostitution are transformed into uniform consumer goods.

The stakes

The stakes in the fight against prostitution are very high. Feminist researchers and sociologists Richard Poulin and Sven Axel Månsson

have shown that the solution is for men finally to recognize women as equals in the social and sexual arenas, and acknowledge that women too have desires, the same right to pleasure and, most importantly, the right to occupy whatever place in society they choose. Men must restore the right to love and to reciprocity. The fundamental question today is whether there are enough men prepared to get involved in fighting sexist policies and challenging the beliefs about gender differences, the idea of men's sexual "needs" and the stigma attached to female sexuality.

There is hope, however. In their June 6, 2004 declaration entitled *Des pierres pour construire*[4], Florence Montreynaud, of the Encore féministes![5] network, singer Jean Ferrat, Christophe Girard, assistant to the Mayor of Paris, and Axel Kahn, Director of the Cochin Institute, suggest that a world without prostitution is possible:

> Dominique Ambiel, former communications adviser to the Prime Minister, has been subpoenaed to appear before the fifteenth Paris Magistrate's Court on Monday, June 7, 2004 on charges of allegedly soliciting an underage girl on April 20 last at 3:00 a.m. on a Paris street. Mr. Ambiel made a statement on TF1:

"I swear on my honour that I have never frequented prostitutes in my life." A well-known advertising executive retorted on Europe 1: "Let him who has never been with a whore throw the first stone!"

And what if instead the majority of men never paid for 'that'... And what if instead they distanced themselves from the advertising executive's statement, which trivializes men's use of prostitution....And what if instead they rose up against a chauvinist and mercenary concept of male sexuality, rooted in domination and the power of money; what if instead they affirmed the need to respect the other person and her desire....They will not necessarily throw stones at Mr. Ambiel if he is found guilty on June 7. There are other uses for stones; for example, they could be used to build a world where sexuality is no longer a commodity. A world where a 17 year old would not have to become a hooker in order to survive (Montreynaud *et al*, 2004).

The Swedish law that penalizes buyers is a major change and an important step towards a more egalitarian society. According to Sven Axel Månsson, one of the positive effects of this

law is that men who buy sex acts are no longer anonymous, and they are made aware of the social and human consequences of their acts. Men can no longer ignore the repercussions on women of being treated as merchandise and exposed to every type of violence. Their challenge is to establish egalitarian social relationships with women.

If Månsson (2003) drew those conclusions, others can as well. His research all points to the fact that real change requires a radical rethinking of men's responsibility in prostitution. For that to happen, he says, we must redefine prostitution as an integral part of masculine identity, attributable to male sexuality and not female sexuality. It cannot be said often enough that without the demand by men for prostitution, there would be no prostituted women.

Despite what people say, prostitution is not "the oldest profession in the world" and it has not always existed. Long before prostitution existed, women had invented agriculture and held other occupations, such as healers and midwives. Monogamous marriage and prostitution are generally thought to have begun about 3,000 years ago, when the institutions of patriarchy

and private property marked the beginning of men's appropriation of women (Engels 1954; Clark 1962; D'Eaubonne 1976; O'Brien 1987). All that has a beginning must also have an end: contrary to what the propaganda says about prostitution being inevitable, it is possible to imagine a world where women and men have abolished prostitution.

Notes

1. Association of sexual assault centres
2. The Nest Movement
3. Common front against sexual exploitation
4. Stones to build with
5. "Still feminists!"

6

What Kind of Society Do We Want?

In her *Report on the consequences of the sex industry in the European Union* tabled in April 2004, European Parliament member Marianne Eriksson calls on member states to take vigorous steps to stop the sex trade:

> Measures of various kinds have been adopted to alert and protect women and implementation has begun, but forceful action to combat demand has barely started.

She is convinced that positives changes will happen only when that kind of action is taken.

Eriksson sounds the alarm and points out that over the last few years several European Union

countries have given in to pressure and, instead of fighting this type of human exploitation, have legalized or regulated prostitution, thus helping to legitimate an economic activity that was traditionally considered criminal. By doing so, Eriksson declares, member states have become players in the sex industry and even profit from it. The European Women's Lobby (EWL) had previously called for sanctions against prostitution clients and more robust policies against pimping.

If a vast solidarity movement does not emerge to demand that governments take measures to prevent and stop prostitution, it may be presented down the road as the alternative to unemployment. Countries will probably do like the Netherlands and give courses on fellatio and sodomy and the roles of dominatrix and slave in the increasingly popular sado-masochistic scenarios.

For feminists, the abolition of prostitution is a long-term goal that requires a re-evaluation of the social, economic and sexual relationships of domination and immediate measures to combat poverty and violence affecting women. Having allowed "houses of tolerance," as brothels are known, are people now going to agree to live

in "countries of tolerance," turning the world into one big brothel where half the population is sexually enslaved by the other?

Marie-Victoire Louis rightly calls for a modern abolitionist movement, aimed at putting an end to the never-abolished right of men to prostitute women, linking the fight against prostitution with the fight against pornography, and investigating and denouncing the vast extent to which procurers have deeply penetrated our media, culture, politics and economies, as well as numerous NGOs. This abolitionist movement would categorically condemn

> the women and men who have reprehensibly proposed the 'right to be prostituted' as the new paradigm for our society, hinting at a world where new rights would be recognized – the right to be dominated, raped, shamed, exploited, enslaved, assassinated – all of which are part and parcel of the system of prostitution (Louis 2003).

In Quebec, there is a consensus that all levels of government should stop treating prostituted women as criminals and should give them access to the health, social, legal and police services they

are asking for, as well as to emergency shelters and long-term safe housing. There is also agreement that violent customers should be charged with criminal offences and that the police should protect women in prostitution and not harass and prosecute them. The debate focuses on the decriminalization of both clients and pimps. It is prostitution rather than prostituted women that must be targeted.

The Swedish experience

For Quebec and Canada, the Swedish example is all the more pertinent because we also have a system of universal social welfare, under which all citizens have access to free medical and health services, welfare benefits and a universal old age pension that are not linked to employment. The only thing left is to ensure, by guaranteeing everyone a decent minimum income, that no one is reduced to entering prostitution in order to survive.

Every possible means must be used to change the attitudes of both men and women, so that prostitution is no longer trivialized under the guise of sexual freedom. We must sensitize all social classes and all social milieus, beginning

with young people, to the terrible effects of prostitution and the fact that it undermines the dignity of all human beings.

On May 4, 2005, during her testimony before the Canadian House of Commons Subcommittee on Solicitation laws, Gunilla Ekberg, special advisor to the Swedish government on the enforcement of that country's prostitution law, stated that "Sweden has a longstanding commitment to gender equality and to combatting prostitution and the trafficking of human beings. We see prostitution as a gender-specific crime and a serious barrier to gender equality in all societies." She stressed that in order to take effective measures, we have to initiate a comprehensive public debate about prostitution and about why these measures are being proposed and implemented. We have to ask: "Who are the ones who are exploited in prostitution, who are the ones who are the cause for these women being exploited, and who benefits from the exploitation of people in prostitution?"

It is also important, added Ekberg, to adequately fund the police, social service organizations, and non-governmental organizations to implement these measures. We must, finally, put into place

attitude-changing programs and sex education programs in schools, in local communities, for military personnel, and in sports clubs. In order "to create permanent change, we must create networks of men who oppose prostitution".

On the prevention side, Sweden has developed programs for secondary schools, using a film about prostitution and a manual that also deals with gender equality, attitudes of boys towards girls in everyday life and on the Internet, etc. More than 30,000 Swedish children have participated in these day-long seminars. Ekberg also talked about the effectiveness of poster campaigns which, instead of showing mini-skirted women with plunging necklines leaning into car windows, featured for the first time a male buyer and prostitutor in a car. These posters, she said, were gigantic and were displayed in many public places, including bus shelters, subway tunnels, buses and trams. They carried clear messages, like "It's a crime to pay for sex".

The fight for a society without prostitution needs to mobilize a large number of people, just as the movement to obtain abortion rights did earlier. This will require taking a stand, making political commitments and attacking the

root problem of the impunity of clients. A first step would be to make prostitution an election issue by questioning groups and political parties about their positions on the prostitution system and forcing them to take a clear position on abolishing prostitution everywhere and propose an action plan to achieve this goal.

While the movement advocating for the complete liberalization of prostitution tries to play down the results of the Swedish law by alleging that Sweden's socio-economic conditions are unique, American researcher Janice G. Raymond (1998) points to the lesser-known experience of Venezuela. In May 1998, the government there adopted a law that rejected the demands of the powerful "pro-sex work" groups that wanted to be registered as a legal trade union of "sex workers." The Venezuelan Ministry of Labour decided that, since most of what was defined as "sex work" was, in fact, prostitution, it amounted to sexual exploitation.

Venezuela's conclusion was that "prostitution cannot be considered work because it lacks the basic elements of dignity and social justice". Given that the principal reason for forming a union is clearly to promote the collective

development of its members and their profession, a decision in favour of unionizing so-called sex workers would promote the development and expansion of prostitution. Other countries, such as South Korea, Finland, Norway, Estonia, Lithuania, the Philippines and the United States, as well as cities such as Glasgow and Madrid have adopted measures, inspired by the Swedish model, to fight against prostitution.

Raymond (2005) reports that, in November 2004, the voters in the liberal city of Berkeley, California, defeated Proposition Q, which would have ranked prostitution as the lowest police priority. The measure was championed by a handful of "sex workers." However, 64 percent of voters were not fooled into thinking that decriminalizing pimps, brothels and clients would protect women in prostitution. Like many feminists, Berkeley voters indicated that they favoured decriminalizing women in prostitution and penalizing those who exploit them and profit from prostitution.

The false panacea of total decriminalization

Raymond further notes that even the indulgent Dutch are closing down their main tole-

rance zones, originally promoted as places that would protect women in prostitution and control the influence of organized crime. In 2004, Amsterdam's mayor admitted that the "Tippelzone," Amsterdam's infamous red light district, had become a haven for traffickers and a dangerous area for women.

Contrary to what groups like Stella and Cabiria claim, decriminalization of the activities of prostituted women as well as those of their clients and pimps would not actually protect the women against increasing poverty and insecurity, but rather make their lives inexorably worse. Moreover, it is impossible to fight child prostitution effectively if adult prostitution is considered a legitimate activity. The idea of once again legalizing brothels, which is supported by certain political figures in France and in Canada, also seems illogical. It would mean that the State would become the chief pimp, in the same way the State has generally replaced the Mafia in casinos: it has not eliminated gambling, just taken its piece of the pie.

On December 9, 2004, the Canadian House of Commons subcommittee tasked with reviewing solicitation laws resumed its hearings that had

been interrupted by the election. The subcommittee was created in 2003 to propose changes to existing prostitution laws that allegedly put prostituted women's lives at risk without solving the problems of those living in neighbourhoods invaded by human and drug traffickers.

The three female members of the subcommittee, who made up the majority, never seemed concerned by the fact that their work could end up providing men with a growing and ever-changing "market" of women. They never questioned the legitimacy of this male need or its long-term effects on all Canadian women. They turned a blind eye to the blatant and often violent sexual relationships of domination that characterize the prostitution system. They actually studied the possibility of letting men, who are the clients of prostitution and the pimps, legally appropriate the poorest and most vulnerable women for their own profit and pleasure. Will the next idea be to decriminalize domestic violence, simply because we haven't been able to eradicate it? This twisted logic is difficult to understand.

It is equally disappointing that amongst Quebec feminist groups only the Centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel

(CALACS) and the World March of Women presented their position to the subcommittee. Does this mean that the majority of feminist social and political groups are in favour of total decriminalization? On the other hand, groups supporting "sex work" appeared before the subcommittee in great numbers across the country, asking the subcommittee to let "sex workers" decide for themselves what they want and allow them to define society's interests in terms of their own. To see men protecting their privileges is not surprising. But the fact that the women on the subcommittee, as well as the majority of women's groups, did not question the normalization of sexual domination seems to me incomprehensible, sad and disturbing (Audet 2005).

Abolition is sometimes criticized as being a negative approach. On the contrary, it seems to us that it is positive to work for a prostitution-free world, both in theory and in practice, by pressuring governments to pass laws and vote the necessary funds to help prostituted women leave prostitution and to take effective action against prostitution customers and pimps.

Let us hope that the wealth of information available concerning prostitution will lead people

to stand up and become involved in this fight, where the fate of women is at stake like never before. Action to curb the commodification of life through biotechnology and the prostitution system must become a priority for feminist groups. By taking up this challenge, the feminist movement could once again find the radicalism and enthusiasm of its "glory days" and refocus its attention on the struggle against patriarchy, which is the cornerstone of prostitution.

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Élaine Audet

Prostitution: Feminist Perspectives

In Canada, as elsewhere, there is a debate about the opportunity to take legislative measures to decriminalize all aspects of prostitution. Measures that would engage the whole society to comply with the individual revendication of a minority asserting that prostitution is a choice. Many feminist researchers from different horizons and countries disagree with such a legislation when the majority of prostituted women refuse to see it as a simple work and would quit if they could.

Élaine Audet presents a synthesis of feminist perspectives on prostitution, a long term implication which means the questioning of social, economics and sexual power relations and the necessity of immediate measure combat poverty and violence against women.

A poet and essayist, Élaine Audet has published a nu of books in Quebec and elsewhere. In collaboration Micheline Carrier, she is responsible for the sisyph website and Éditions Sisyphe.

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